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You have to really be clear on what kind of story you're telling... and be okay with your level of authenticity. —*Shonda Rhimes*

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CHAPTER RECAP

Effective research is key to bringing your story to life and pulling your audience into your show's world. It can provide the details to realistically portray a profession or rarefied world, and provide ideas for the visual setting, future episodes, and character development.

Some pilots require more research than others, and you should decide how much research and authenticity you are comfortable with in your own story. The internet has made the research process simpler than ever, but don't exclude books, documentaries, and other resources to help inform your story.

When speaking with subject-matter experts, be more of a listener than a talker. You should aim to leave your preconceptions and ideas at the door so you can begin to understand what their world feels like from their perspective. No detail is too small; for Shonda, learning the minutiae of what it's like to be a surgical intern informed many of the decisions she made in the *Grey's Anatomy* pilot. The research she did informed where her characters congregated in the hospital, and which surgeries she wanted to do in the pilot to expand on character development.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- ▶ Learn more about Judy Smith, the inspiration behind the show *Scandal*, in [this interview](#).
- ▶ Share stories of any previous experiences interviewing people for a script in [The Hub](#). How did you take notes? What kind of questions did you start with?

SUBCHAPTERS

- ▶ Start With the Basic Resources
- ▶ Talk to People to Gain Invaluable Details
- ▶ Let Your Subject Talk
- ▶ Take Notes, But Remember to Listen
- ▶ Case Study: Researching *Grey's Anatomy*

NOTES

05 RESEARCHING YOUR STORY

SHONDA RHIMES TEACHES WRITING FOR TELEVISION 15

ASSIGNMENT

- ▶ With your TV show premise that you created in Chapter 4, find five sources to speak to about your story. If your show is a medical drama, reach out to doctors or nurses. If your show centers around politics, find political staffers or lobbyists. After conducting your interviews, revisit your premise, character, and episode list. Are there characters you feel should be added or altered in light of the information you gleaned from interviews? Do some aspects of your premise need to be refined or honed?

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